

PARTIAL TRANSCRIPTION - ORIGINAL FOLLOWS

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[column 1]

Babrak's Perils

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[column 2]

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Afghanistan: Najibullah Replaces Babrak Karmal (U)

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(U) The depth of Soviet commitment to Karmal has been suspect, and on numerous occasions the Kremlin appears to have sounded out Western diplomats about possible concessions in exchange for his removal. Despite Karmal's ineffectiveness, Moscow has supported him, believing he enjoyed a certain legitimacy derived both from his elected tenure in Afghanistan's Parliament (1965-73) and his brief stint as Prime Minister during the Communist government of Nur Mohammad Taraki.

Najibullah: An Afghan Andropov?

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(U) After the December 1979 invasion, Moscow recalled the Parchams to Afghanistan to serve in the new surrogate government. A top Soviet priority for that regime was the development of an effective national secret police force capable of suppressing internal dissent. Before his murder during the invasion, Hafizullah Amin, the country's Communist leader in 1979, had organized a small but ruthless secret police force known as the Worker's Intelligence Establishment, or KAM.

88-DIA-0435-88-56

(U) KAM

was given a less Marxist sounding name, the Government Information Service (Khadamat-i-Etla'at-i-Dolati or KhAD), and Najib was appointed its director.

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(U) *Dr. Najibullah, Afghanistan's New 39-Year-Old Leader.*

(U) The problems of building the KhAD into a formidable weapon of Soviet policy surfaced quickly. KhAD attempts to insert agents into the Mujahideen-controlled Afghan countryside were generally ineffective and hundreds of such agents were lost. However, Najib has had considerably greater success in Kabul and Peshawar, Pakistan where KhAD agents can be inserted among the disorganized refugee population. By 1983 KhAD assassinations and active measures operations were beginning to hurt the Mujahideen. Although the KhAD continues to lose large numbers of its operatives, its generous budget has enabled the KhAD to maintain rapid growth.

(U) KhAD's growth and increasingly formidable reputation stood in contrast to virtu-

ally every other institution of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA). Najib's actions within the KhAD were strongly subject to Soviet oversight. He was able to establish a record of complete reliability in defense of Soviet interests. One KhAD department chief who defected in 1983 noted that Najib is given to repeated sycophantic statements, including proclaiming that he regards himself as "a son of Lenin," and that Afghanistan is "lucky to have Soviet help." In 1984, Moscow permitted Najib to begin a process of "Parchamizing" the KhAD, a move which both increased KhAD's internal security and ensured greater responsiveness to Najib himself.

Najib's Opportunity

(U) Since Gorbachev's accession to power, Moscow has been attempting to confuse the West and create an impression of enhanced Soviet flexibility over Afghanistan, including experimenting with more innovative political and military tactics in that country. Political initiatives aimed at tribal leaders in both Afghanistan and Pakistan were coupled with mock elections and a host of diplomatic and public activities aimed at creating an impression of enhanced Soviet flexibility. On the battlefield, improvements in intelligence and greater tactical mobility, the latter symbolized by the expanding role of Soviet Spetznaz battalions, were accelerated.

(U) In Kabul, Najib maneuvered skillfully to improve his position and preempt possible criticism from Moscow.

Outlook

(U) Meanwhile, signs began to emerge that Babrak Karmal's position was becoming considerably more vulnerable. In early May, Karmal journeyed to Moscow where he received a markedly cool reception.

(U) Although Najib's personal star was on the rise, it appears at this point he was still not the leading contender to replace Karmal. Both Keshtmand and Nur had better political credentials, and neither man carried Najib's public relations liabilities incurred as Afghanistan's top thug. However, the KhAD's growing importance in almost all phases of the DRA's activities provided Najib a platform for promoting his candidacy.

(U) Throughout the summer of 1985, Najib consolidated his position as the most effective member of the PDPA and Moscow's only effective agent in the DRA. While Karmal's clique was making a mess of sham elections intended to demonstrate the PDPA's popularity, Najib was managing a campaign to stir up trouble for Pakistan by subverting Pushtun tribes in Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province.

(U) In November 1985, following a large number of arrests within the DRA armed forces by KhAD, Najib suddenly was promoted to the position of Central Committee Secretary with new authority over all DRA internal security institutions. The importance of Najib's new stature was acknowledged quickly by the Soviets in Kabul, who noted the similarity between Najib's rise and that of Yuri Andropov.

(U) In retrospect, it is now clear that by November Najib had outmaneuvered all other contenders and stood clearly positioned to replace Karmal. Less clear is the actual impetus to make the change on 4 May. By doing so on the eve of the upcoming seventh round of negotiations with Pakistan in Geneva, Moscow may expect it has strengthened significantly Kabul's ability to present an independent front. But there were also good reasons to keep Karmal. Replacing him on the eve of those negotiations ended any possibility of Moscow presenting Karmal's departure as a concession to Pakistan. Moscow also may have wanted to have a strongman in control for the next round of the Geneva talks.

(U) The leadership change undoubtedly reflects Soviet frustration with the continuing internecine warfare between the PDPA's Parcham and Khalqi factions. Ethnic rivalries between the primarily Pushtun Khalqi and the generally non-Pushtun Parchamis have compounded the bloody feud. The elevation of Najibullah, an Ahmadzai Pushtun, may be seen in Moscow as a way to reduce Khalqi alienation within the PDPA.

(U) If Moscow is hoping to appease the Khalqi by appealing to their Pushtun tribal nationalism, they probably have selected the wrong man. Najib has a reputation of intense hatred toward members of the Khalqi faction. Unlike Najib, Moscow has maintained strong ties with leading members of the Khalqi faction, particularly its unofficial leader, the DRA's Interior Minister Sayed Mohammad Gulabzoi. The Kremlin is only too aware of the limited number of Communist adherents available to it in Afghanistan, and consistently has demonstrated a reluctance to allow either faction to gain a decisive edge. If Najib undertakes any immediate or indiscriminate purge of the Khalqi, it probably would indicate that Moscow has placed broad trust in him, providing him greater leeway than his predecessor.

(U) A second key indicator of Najib's power will come in his treatment of Karmal and his allies in the Central Committee. Babrak, his mistress Anihita Ratebzad, and his brother Mahmud Baryali all remain either full or candidate members of the 12-man Politburo.

(U) The fate of Najib's other potential rivals, such as Keshtmand and Nur, both of whom remain full members of the Politburo, could be another indication. According to Kabul's evening news, the motion nominating Najib was made by Keshtmand and seconded by Nur, perhaps an early indication that both of those potential rivals have accommodated themselves to Najib's preeminence. Yet, of the 12 members of the PDPA's Politburo, only Solayman Laeq is known to be a reliable ally of Najib.

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(U) Karmal's retention of both his Politburo status and his Presidency of the largely ceremonial Revolutionary Council indicate a strong Soviet interest in giving an impression of leadership unity and peaceful transition. The Kremlin probably would prefer a gradual reduction of Karmal's role in the DRA, seeking to avoid more drastic purges like those that eliminated earlier leaders of the Afghan Communist party. Najib's previous relations with Karmal generally have been reported as good, and Afghanistan's new Communist leader may share the Kremlin's interest in letting Karmal down easy.

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